**Africa RISING Malawi**

Minutes for monthly meeting: Held at Four Seasons in Lilongwe on 20th November 2015

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**Opening remarks**

The Chair, Dr Chikowo welcomed all members present. He indicated the importance of conducting regular monthly meetings as a team in order to appraise each other and track progress. He also mentioned that other members failed to join for the meeting due to other commitments. In particular, faculty at LUANAR had classes.

**Agenda**

1. Preparation for the upcoming USAID commissioned evaluation scheduled to take place in February/March, 2016
2. Legume conference in Livingstone in Zambia
3. Highlights for the activities currently being implemented by different partners and planned activities for the next cropping season
4. Any other business

**Summary of deliberations**

External review of project

On the upcoming Africa RISING USAID commissioned evaluation, it was emphasized that this is very important as decisions on future USAID investments on the program will also be influenced by what progress we have made during this current phase. Therefore, it was emphasized that all partners should prepare to showcase on-going interventions on ground and demonstrate that we are on the right path towards impact. As the project, we are in the 5th year, a point at which it is reasonable for donors to expect usable products from the researchers.

*PanAfrica Grain Legumes and Cowpea Conference*:

On the upcoming 29 Feb -4 March 2016, PanAfrica Grain Legumes and Cowpea Conference legume conference in Livingstone in Zambia, members were informed that this is an important forum where partners can present papers. Africa RISING members are encouraged to participate and submit abstracts. The Graduate students were encouraged to apply for travel grants that are available, for both oral and poster presentations. Dr Chikowo is part of the Conference Organizing Committee

*Highlights of progress*

Highlights of activities were presented by representatives of partners

CIAT:

* Emphasized the importance of continuing with the bean demonstrations that tested different varieties and soil fertility inputs, coupled with participatory evaluation during the season and at harvest time
* The bush beans adapted to drought conditions and attracted a lot of interest from stakeholders. These varieties will do well and steps must be taken by relevant government departments for official release of the varieties
* Facilitation on adoption of technologies that are useful for soils fertility is important. Animal manure is in short supply – farmers are using alternative sources such as composting
* Plans for the 2015/16 season; Experiments will be repeated with minor adjustments for instance checking residual effects on maize
* Old and a few new sites will be used
* CIAT managed baby trial farmers will be increased from the current 200 to about 250 farmers

ICRAF:

* The project continued collecting data on milk yields among farmers. Preliminary result from 11 farmers showed that some farmers are getting 15 liters of milk per day per cow. This is sharp contrast to the 4-5 L that is common
* Demonstrating use of manure among dairy farmers and how this in turn support crop production is important. The key question is on the quantities available, but this is partly offset by the improved quality – less available may still make a huge impact
* Grain legume tree intercrop experiments generated rich data which will continue in the approaching cropping season. Dairy farmers will also be supported with beans and tephrosia so they are more integrated with the cropping activities

LUANAR

LUANAR has recruited new graduate students

* Peter Chimangeni – Agronomy. Peter will investigate the effect of agroecology on the populations of component crops in doubled up cropping systems. A first draft of the proposal has been finailized
* Hazwell - research will focus on gender and decion making at the household level – for intensification of legumes and cereals. If land is a constraint, are decisions different?
* Khumbo - is looking nutrition aspects targeting dairy farmers that have been engaged by ICRAF over the past 3 years. Has this resulted in increased milk protein intake by children? Khumalo will support farmers with training on other value addition activities such as making *Chambiko*, yoghurt etc. The main challenge on his work is that there are few farmers that have dairy cows and under-five children. As solution, it was proposed that he can work with other dairy farmer groups like Chitsanzo, Magomero that are outside the Africa RISING sites but where ICRAF has had interventions over the years

MSU

* Emphasis is on consolidation of the action groups already in place and supporting graduate students top provide more insights on systems functioning through their thesis projects
* Trials are at various phases for instance, 3rd and 4th year – we can now track medium term changes in biophysical parameters
* Doubled up legume technology - INVC has shown interest in scaling this up
* Simple agronomy is fundamental towards intensifying crop yields. For example, double rows of groundnuts on ridges immediately increases productivity from <1 t/ha to >1.2 t/ha. If farmers cannot afford fertilizers, lets emphasis on good plant population as an entry point to increase returns to labour – weeding is a fixed for poor and good plant populations
* R4D platforms must be facilitated to remain afloat. There is high turnover of personnel in districts. Partners were encouraged to join R4D platforms, also as an important learning platform – important development challenges are discussed in these meetings by various NGOs
* Legume seed has already been distributed to farmers. We expect farmers to increase area under improved technologies, but last season’s following and drought means that many farmers may already have consumed all that they harvested last season. How is this supposed to be sustainable? – continued provision of legume seed is not viable

***AOB***

* Next team meeting: mid January 2015
* Lets plan for a joint field trip to monitor early crop in January 2016

**List of participants**

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